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ABSTRACT

This pilot study demonstrates the applicability of the job club concept for adults with developmental disabilities who have completed a vocational training program at Chicago City-Wide College (CCC). The pilot project, which served 26 students, operated in a business-like atmosphere with rules such as those found in workplaces. The job club coordinator developed four modules for use with the club members, who met three times a week for two hours each day for eight weeks. Modules dealt with identifying skills, developing resumes, completing job applications, getting and doing well in job interviews, using telephone skills to make job queries, holding onto a job once hired, developing self-esteem and motivation, and dealing with problems. The modules drew from many commercial materials, of which nine titles are listed. The job club focused specifically on the employment goal of full-time, permanent, paid employment. In addition to the coordinator, a part-time job club coach was hired, and other part-time help was used for placement assistance. CCC used a pre/post assessment instrument based on student self-reports. The assessment showed an increase in knowledge in 18 of the instrument's 25 skill or knowledge areas following the job club experience. However, only 17 students completed all activities, and only four found full-time jobs; three became self-employed, and eight enrolled for further training. The outcomes indicate that the job club concept has merit, with adaptations, for helping some high-risk students with developmental disabilities find full-time, permanent jobs with good benefits. (KC)

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PILOTING A JOB CLUB FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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RUNNING HEAD: Piloting a Job Club

ABSTRACT

This pilot study demonstrates the applicability of the job club concept for adults with developmental disabilities who have completed a vocational training program at Chicago City-Wide College. Adaptations of the job club concept at the site are discussed and the efficacy of the job club is examined in terms of its general utility for this population in a community college setting. Outcomes indicate that the concept has merit, with adaptations, for helping some high-risk students with developmental disabilities find full-time, permanent jobs with good benefits.

PILOTING A JOB CLUB FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Why a Job Club?

Job placement is a critical part of the lives of most adult Americans. For persons with developmental disabilities, finding and retaining employment is a particular problem. Between 74-86 percent of adults with developmental disabilities are either unemployed or not considered to be in the labor market, yet "475,000 developmentally disabled adults would like some assistance in seeking employment and would consider entering employment if given the opportunity" (Kiernan and Bruininks 1986, pp. 34-35).

The Center for Disabled Student Services at Chicago City-Wide College recently served as one of three demonstration sites for a pilot test of the job club concept applied in 2-year colleges for students with disabilities. The pilot project, operated by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, tried out the job club approach at Chicago City-Wide College (CCC), Columbus Technical Institute (Ohio), and the Community College of Rhode Island. The other two demonstration job clubs served college students with a mix of disabilities, but CCC's job club was unique in that it served primarily students with developmental disabilities.

According to Kiernan and Stark (1986), "It is the experience of participating in the decision-making process, understanding the options, and accepting the responsibility of the choice that helps the adult with developmental disabilities move from a dependent to

an independent adult status" (p. 104). Job clubs specifically provide these kinds of experiences, focusing them on the task of learning how to find and actually obtain appropriate employment.

Job clubs have been used since the early 1970s to help all kinds of people -- including persons with disabilities -- overcome the barriers to finding work (Azrin 1978; Azrin and Philip 1979).

> The Job Club Method, as its name implies, is more than the activity of an individual; it is the activity of an individual as part of a group of fellow job seekers, working together under the instruction and encouragement of a leader who provides support, information, facilities, and supplies. (Azrin and Besalel 1980, pp. 2-3)

In effect, a job club is a temporary alliance of job seekers who meet regularly to provide mutual aid and reinforcement to each other's job searches, with the guidance of a job club coordinator who provides training and counseling in job-seeking skills.

In 1985, the National Center for Research in Vocational Education received a federal grant to pilot test at three sites a model demonstration job club for students with disabilities. Before that project (reported in Faddis and Long 1986), no one had attempted to apply the job club concept systematically in a 2-year college setting to help students with disabilities make the transition from school to work. CCC's job club, with its majority of members with developmental disabilities, presented a special opportunity. CCC disagreed with the "state of the practice," which holds that adults with developmental disabilities are not employable; rather, the college accepted the challenge to establish "a 'state of the art' that expands both training and

creation of employment opportunities for the developmentally disabled adult" (Kiernan and Bruininks 1986, p. 36).

The CCC Job Club

Vocational Training for Students with Developmental Disabilities

CCC's Center for Disabled Student Services was established in 1974 to provide access for adults with disabilities to the full range of programs and services available at the eight member colleges of the City Colleges of Chicago (of which CCC is one). The Center serves approximately 2,000 students with disabilities each year through integrated college programs. The specialized Vocational Training Programs assist adults with developmental disabilities, who cannot benefit from regular college courses, to meet their career goals.

The Vocational Training Programs, which last approximately 4 months per program, are cooperative training experiences that involve on-the-job training while working on site for a number of employers throughout the City of Chicago. Students work one-on-one with designated employees. Intensive, hands-on training is provided for careers in hotel services, clerical services, hospital services, maintenance/laundry services, and food services. Individualized, disability-specific support services are offered in addition to supervision and training of appropriate work behaviors and placement and follow-up services.

CCC's Vocational Training Programs, in operation since 1979, have successfully trained more than 500 students with developmental disabilities and have placed approximately 375 of

them in full-time, nonsubsidized jobs. Even though this placement ratio is astoundingly high, CCC staff feel an obligation to place all of their program graduates. Many of those who "fall through the cracks" are the lower-functioning students in the programs. Most of these students exhibit special difficulties with self-esteem, motivation, independent decision making, self-expression, and a grasp of the requirements of the work world. Since the Vocational Training Programs' placement specialists lack the resources to deal directly with such problems, CCC chose to work with the National Center to see whether a job club approach could meet these students' job search needs.

Tailoring the Job Club Concept

In designing the pilot study, the National Center recognized that the traditional job club approach, applied to a community college setting for students with disabilities, would require some modification. For those with hearing impairments, sign interpreters would be needed for job club meetings, one-on-one counseling sessions with the job club coordinator, and job interviews. Students with mobility and visual impairments would require access and modification of materials, and might have extra problems with transportation. Because of their developmental disabilities, and because most students in CCC's job club were disadvantaged as well, CCC's job club had to make even more modifications to the traditional job club concept than did the other two demonstration sites.

A distinguishing adaptation in CCC's job club was its structure. The job club coordinator chose to establish a businesslike atmosphere that deliberately simulated the workplace. The coordinator and members addressed each other as "Mr." or "Ms." The coordinator emphasized to members that she functioned as a proxy for "the boss" they would have on the job. She also established rules for the job club, most of which parallel those found in a typical workplace. These rules are as follows:

1. You must be punctual to all job club meetings and to all interviews.
2. You must be appropriately dressed (as if for work) and must maintain good hygiene skills.
3. You must not use profanity (abusive language).
4. You must demonstrate appropriate behavior at meetings at all times.
5. You must attend all job club meetings, unless advanced approval has been obtained from the coordinator.
6. You must give advance notice for all appointments (doctor, public aid, etc.) except for emergencies.
7. You must not chew gum in the meeting room.
8. You must not bring weapons or guns on the premises.
9. You must be attentive, participate, and show cooperation with the coordinator and fellow students.
10. You must personally contact at least three employers per week about job openings, and must supply information such as the name, address, phone number, and position applied for to the job club coordinator.

Despite the simulated workplace structure, a traditional classroom format was used for the meetings, one that emphasized lecture and practice accompanied by group discussion. This

approach aided students who had difficulties with attention span, communication skills, and the like.

The coordinator developed four modules for use with the job club members, who met three times a week for 2 hours each day over a period of 8 weeks. Most job club activities followed the traditional model. For example, two modules deal with identifying skills, developing resumes, completing job applications, getting and doing well in job interviews, using telephone skills to make job queries, and holding onto a job once you get it.

The other two modules directly address the members' special problems in self-esteem, motivation, and so forth. The first module used deals with self-awareness -- "unlocking your potentials." Exercises in this module help job club members in such areas as potential versus effectiveness, awareness and conditioning, how you think, attitudes and self-image, visualization, self-esteem, self-motivation, goal setting, developing a plan of action, and thought patterns of winners. The next module used focuses on motivation for work and includes experiences and readings on an overview of work, fulfilling personal needs (i.e., physical, security, social, self-respect, self-worth, and self-fulfillment needs), what work is, and why people seek jobs.

The modules make use of or adapt many commercially available materials. Resources from which the coordinator drew included the following:

- Anema, Durlynn. Don't Get Fired. Hayward, CA: Janus Books, 1978.

- Baker, James F. Professional Resume Writing Techniques. Hinsdale, IL: Continuing Writing Systems, Inc., 1985.
- Bradley, Bobbie J. Career Development and Placement Center. Chicago: Chicago City-Wide College, 1984.
- Fietler-Karchin, Barbara J. Job Search Strategies. Hinsdale, IL: Continuing Education Systems, Inc., 1985.
- Illinois Bell. Personally Speaking. Issue 1. Chicago: Illinois Bell, (n.d.).
- Illinois State Board of Education. Methods and Materials for Teaching Occupational Survival Skills. Springfield: Illinois State Board of Education, 1979.
- Kahn, Charles. My Job Application File. Hayward, CA: Janus Books, 1980.
- Moawad, B. Unlocking Your Potentials (filmstrip). Tacoma, WA: Edge Learning Institute, 1984.
- Wing, J., & Tong, R. Job Interview Kit (filmstrips). Hayward, CA: Janus Books, (n.d.).

To ensure that the job club met its internal and external linkage needs, CCC staff involved in planning the job club conferred with employers, representatives of pertinent organizations, and other persons concerned with the training and placement of individuals with disabilities. These persons had served or were candidates to serve on the advisory committee for Disabled Student Services at CCC. The advisory committee itself was in flux at the time of the job club planning and could not be convened. Nonetheless, many knowledgeable and concerned persons provided valuable advice for p.anning the job club.

CCC's Vocational Training Programs already had in place many cooperative arrangements with city and state agencies and organizations, as well as with local employers through whose

auspices the CCC students received cooperative training. The job club coordinator developed new linkages with the Amoco Corporation (which helps train "special citizens" to find jobs and which provided the club with materials and guest speakers), the American Spanish Institute (an Hispanic support group that assisted the job club members -- Hispanic and otherwise -- in locating employment openings), Project Match of Northwestern University (which exchanged ideas and services with the job club, particularly for placement), Lighthouse for the Blind (which helped develop materials and strategies for working with job club members who had visual impairments), and others.

Operating the Job Club

At CCC, 26 participants attended one or the other of two pilot job club cohorts at CCC. The first cohort ran from March through April, 1986, and the second ran from May through June, 1986, each for 8 weeks. Of the 26 members, 20 had developmental disabilities and 6 had hearing impairments. The students were recruited from the college's Vocational Training Programs.

The CCC job club focused specifically on the employment goal of full-time, permanent, paid employment. The club viewed part-time or seasonal jobs as an alternative only to no placement at all, because such jobs usually offer no fringe benefits, long-term job security, or career advancement opportunities. The ultimate goal of the job club was to help the members achieve economic self-sufficiency.

To staff the job club (in addition to the job club coordinator), a part-time job club coach was hired from the Vocational Training Program for 20 hours a week. This aide assisted with small group activities during meetings, did legwork (including accompanying members to job sites to help them fill out job applications, if necessary), and helped with the job club paperwork. Unfortunately, the coordinator quickly found that she also needed other kinds of staff assistance. The club members had limited or no academic skills and required considerable individual help with writing resumes, cover letters, and so forth. To resolve this, an in-house placement specialist, career development staff, and literacy staff were recruited for 6 hours a week to give the club members the individualized instruction they needed. This instruction was given outside of the job club meetings.

The club met in an existing classroom at CCC. When members needed to use a telephone to make job queries, they were given access to a phone (usually the club coordinator's) in the Disabled Student Services offices nearby.

CCC used a pre/post assessment instrument, based on student self-reports, that was developed for the three pilot sites by the National Center. The instrument was designed to (a) give the coordinator some idea of the entering level of job-seeking skills and savvy of each job club member and (b) enable the researchers to compare (roughly) the members' incoming skills and knowledge with their exiting skills and knowledge in order to help estimate the success of the job club experience.

To teach members how to locate job opportunities, CCC's job club coordinator showed them how to use city and neighborhood newspaper want ads, the Yellow Pages (to locate employers who may need workers with the members' job skills), and personal contacts (e.g., family, friends, acquaintances, former employers or instructors, local political figures, and so forth). In addition, the job club brought a number of guest speakers to talk to the members about locating jobs, about employer expectations, about filling out job applications, about giving good job interviews, and the like. In the future, the coordinator hopes to establish a speakers' bureau from which to draw speakers to talk to the members.

The coordinator and other staff worked with the job club group and with members individually to help them develop and refine their resumes, cover letters, thank you letters, and other crucial written materials for their job searches. Besides developing a complete resume, each member was also assisted in developing a one-page "pocket cribsheet" resume that the member could take along and use for handy reference at job interviews.

To help the members form good interview skills, the club required each student to undergo a mock interview. The coordinator brought in a college staff person, who was not known to the club members, to conduct the mock interviews. Having a stranger conduct these interviews created a realistic atmosphere, because persons going for job interviews seldom know the interviewer personally. CCC also videotaped the mock interviews and played them back. This helped members examine their

performance and observe their nervousness, specific verbal responses, need for more elaboration, and body language. In this way, they could ascertain whether they successfully minimized their disability and maximized their ability to perform on the job. Role playing was also used to help the members develop their telephone skills for making job queries.

Coordinators at all three of the pilot sites found that the job club members required considerable amounts of individual counseling. Areas in which they required the most one-on-one attention were with filling out job applications, preparing resumes, and identifying their work skills. At CCC, a number of the job club members had serious personal problems that disrupted their ability to participate in and make successful use of the job club experiences. Some of the problems included drug abuse, unplanned pregnancy, and emotional difficulties. In such cases, the coordinator referred the members to appropriate outside agencies or other services. A number of members were unable to complete the job club activities for such reasons.

To assist the members with finding placement, two placement specialists from the Vocational Training Programs helped the coordinator network with and gather resource information from employers, agencies, and organizations around Chicago. These staff also developed a job availability list of the job club members and sent the list to outside placement agencies. The list contained capsules (one-two sentences) on members' skills. In addition to this help, members were expected to pursue employment

opportunities on their own, as well as share information with each other at the meetings.

A unique problem that CCC had to address was that of transportation. Because most of CCC's job club members were disadvantaged as well as having developmental disabilities, many found that they could not afford the frequent transportation (three times a week) to and from the club meetings, as well as to and from work sites or offices to fill out job applications or attend job interviews. To counter this dilemma, college found additional monies to provide these members with transportation stipends. The transportation problem was also a factor in cancelling initial plans for the club to visit several employer worksites.

Outcomes

Although the study of job clubs for college students with disabilities was only a pilot effort, National Center researchers did collect some quantitative as well as observational information. The pretest assessment instrument results were questioned, however, because the club coordinators felt that the students tended to overestimate their entering skill levels. But even if the entering self-reports are too high, the posttest results show a significant increase in most of the job and job-seeking knowledge and skills on the instrument.

For example, at CCC, 18 of the 25 skill or knowledge areas show increases following the job club experiences. The areas of highest gain include knowledge or skills in knowing what employers

expect of workers (50 percent gain), how to get letters of recommendation from others on your behalf (43 percent gain), how to fill out a job application (36 percent gain), how to use community support services after you start working (33 percent gain), and how to do well in a job interview (32 percent gain). Areas where the members report an apparent loss of knowledge include how to use the telephone for job hunting (11 percent loss), how to discuss your special need or handicap with employers (11 percent loss), and how to develop a career plan (9 percent loss). These negative figures make clear that reason that the pretest assessment results were high was because students overestimated their entering skill levels. After the job club experiences, they came to realize how little they actually had known about getting and keeping a good job.

The CCC job club scores showing losses of skill or knowledge may also reflect members' difficulties in reading and test taking. On the other hand, it should be noted that the scores across all three demonstration sites reveal a strong pattern of self-reported gains in job search and work-related knowledge and skills.

Of the 26 students participating in the CCC job club, only 17 completed all activities. Within the 2-month follow-up period after the job club ended, 4 of these 17 had found full-time jobs, 3 became self-employed (e.g., in babysitting for relatives), 8 had enrolled in or were engaged in programs for further job training, and 2 were planning to attend school in the coming fall. Several of the program dropouts left because of personal problems, such as unplanned pregnancy, but two reported that the job club

experiences helped them realize that they wanted more training before looking for permanent jobs.

It should be recalled that CCC's job club members were an especially high-risk group, as the Vocational Training Programs placement specialists had already tried and failed to place them. Of the four members who did find full-time jobs within the 2-month data collection period (a rather brief period necessitated by project time limitations), their jobs entailed permanent employment with good benefits and job security -- major emphases for CCC's job club. The employment rates also do not reflect the job search savvy gained by the members returning to school, who may eventually put those skills to use.

National Center staff also collected qualitative information in the form of observations and anecdotes and incorporated it with information gleaned from site reports to help analyze the overall outcomes of the pilot study. It was found that all three demonstration sites deviated somewhat from the traditional job club design by offering more individualized and intensive assistance to the members and by providing more direct placement assistance than would a job club for a more general population. Coordinators felt this extra effort was necessary to help members with disabilities overcome problems unique to their situations, including low self-esteem and motivation, less contact with and knowledge about the job world than many other persons may have, reluctance on the part of many employers to interview and hire persons with disabilities, and so forth.

Despite the extra effort necessary, the job club members and the coordinators at all three sites have expressed satisfaction with the job club activities and outcomes. The coordinator at CCC feels that the club provided members with a unique opportunity to develop job search and job-keeping skills that they may otherwise never have acquired or refined.

According to CCC's job club coordinator, an equally important outcome of the job club was helping the students realize that, despite their disabilities, they have a responsibility not only to recognize but also to develop, master, and use their skills to establish successful, independent lifestyles. Initially, they may need to participate in other modes of education, such as literacy classes, which enhance their chances of success in the work world. But ultimately, it is full-time or part-time work, with good pay and benefits, that paves the avenue for economic and social independence.

To achieve readiness for the work world, the CCC students made good use of a major benefit of the job club structure: the opportunity to speak openly about their job hunting experiences and strategies, to share information, and most crucially, to draw emotional support from their peers. However, the coordinator found that a job club for students with developmental disabilities cannot follow a standard job club structure in which the participants assume significant responsibility for the initiation of club activities. Students with developmental disabilities need extra guidance and encouragement to boost their self-esteem and motivation and change their negative visualizations about work to

positive ones. These students need an authority figure to provide structure, support, constructive feedback, and sincere interest.

The kinds of experiences provided in a job club are necessities for students with developmental disabilities to help them find good employment (above minimum wage) with full benefits. With the placement assistance provided by CCC's job club, the students who did find jobs found them speedily, the job content was well related to the students' actual skills, and the jobs provided for possible career growth instead of the permanent entry-level positions more typically occupied by workers with developmental disabilities.

Colleges that provide a job club for students with developmental disabilities will find that the job club plugs them into a rich network in the employment community. This stimulates [illegible]crease of awareness and communication between college and employers. In addition, the job club helps the students develop or improve their self-esteem, their hygiene and grooming, their ability to express themselves, and their awareness of other support resources, such as agencies in the community. As these students make contacts with employers and agencies and acquire and keep good jobs, they enhance the reputation of the college that assisted them to make these positive moves.

A job club is an effective approach to helping students as well as extending the college's outreach and prestige. But a club can only be effective for students with developmental disabilities when it addresses all of the issues critical to these students: their special learning needs, their self-esteem and motivational

needs, the attitudes of employers toward hiring them, the responsibilities and realities of the work world, and the extra support, effort, and understanding needed to cope with these challenges.

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